2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



villages, however, the headman's activities may be as circumscribed by ritual prohibitions as the chief's are.

The village headman is subject not only to mystical dangers but also to other dangers deriving from his position of authority. It is significant that villagers never go to a diviner to find out the cause of a village headman's death. When I asked informants why this was so, they said, 'Well, what's the use of it? He has enemies on all sides in the village who are trying to kill him with their magic.' In harmony with this view of village headmanship, the symbolic object which represents the village headman in the diviners' gourds I have seen, is a small ring of grass (*singwa*), a copy of the grass cushion women place on their heads when they are carrying loads. This symbolizes the ring of enemies which surrounds the village headman. The saying 'the tortoise defecates on the one who carries it',[1] usually applied to chieftainship, applies equally well to a village headman.

A village headman may expect little material benefit from his position of authority. If he is an Administrative village headman he may be paid a small annuity of 5*s.* or 10*s.*[2] Returning labour migrants may give him a blanket or a military overcoat, or perhaps a few shillings, but this is not usual. If he is not a strict Moslem he will almost certainly be given a pot of beer from every brewing made for sale in the local 'club house'. On the other hand, if an important stranger, particularly a White official, arrives in the village he feels he must give his guest a chicken. It is mannerly to reciprocate with another gift, but not all Whites know this, or, if they do, do not observe it. In particular if the chief comes to his village, he will be expected to entertain him and here can expect no recompense—the chief 'eats from his country'.

The Yao know that the position of headman is no sinecure. Frequently the one chosen to succeed refuses to accept the position, especially if he is well placed in employment. It is significant that the word for an heir is *litegwa*[3]—the one who is trapped. An

[1] *Nyogo jikunyela nuyene liwjigele.*

[2] Until recently this was true. As I was leaving the field in 1949, I heard that the Administration had decided to abandon this system in favour of one in which only group headmen would be remunerated.

[3] Substantive form of the passive of the verb *kutego*—to set a trap as for animals. This word is not widely known, especially among the younger Yao.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



tenance of the whole state under a new king,[1] but the Yao political units seem to have split into two factions when divisions appeared within them. The dissident faction left the parent chiefdom and established itself somewhere else as an independent entity.

The picture my informants have given me substantiates MacDonald's account, though his contact was mainly with Mangoche and not with Machinga Yao. My informants, however, placed greater emphasis than he did upon the importance of trade with the coast. A slave-trading trip was not a venture which the ordinary village headman could undertake with equanimity. The journey to the coast, to Quilimane or to Kilwa, was long and arduous, and strong military protection against bandits was needed. A caravan could only be sent by a chief or someone of like status, so that the coastal trade became the monopoly of the chiefs. Headmen who had ivory and slaves to send to the coast included them in the chief's caravan. When it returned, the headmen were able to collect calico and beads to the value of their contribution. Gun-powder also seems to have been a chief's monopoly. Thus, in fact, he did have some physical control over the military activities of his subject village headmen, since he could withhold supplies of gun-powder if he wished. But in a society where minor chieftains were inimically poised against each other, the maxim 'a chief without people is nothing' had much more significance than it has to-day: a village headman's ultimate sanction was that he could withdraw his support from one chief and give it to another.

## The Effects of White Conquest

It was into a society thus organized that the first Missionaries came. I have already described how the Missionaries, by taking in runaway slaves, and by occasional armed combat, entered into political relationships with the chiefs. With the establishment of the Protectorate, the policy, clearly expressed in Sir Harry Johnston's letter,[2] was to stamp out slavery. This was done in numerous campaigns against the Yao chiefs[3] so that by

[1] See Gluckman, M., 'Succession and Civil War among the Bemba: An Exercise in Anthropological Theory', *Human Problems*, xvi (1954), 6-25.

[2] See fn., p. 29.

[3] See Chap. II, pp. 29-30.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



19. That portion of the gut of animals having folds of mucus membrane inside, may be eaten only by old people past the child-propagating age. *If* a young woman should eat it, she would have difficulty in labor.

20. It is believed that people who eat too freely of a little fish like whitebait called *matemba* get obstruction of the bowel by the wedging together of the bones. The treatment adopted is to pass up the rectum a smooth stick with a pad of rag at the end. This cannot be done by the person himself and so the aid of another has to be called in; only an intimacy, such as the relationship of brother-in-law gives, will warrant this service being asked.

21. The Yao believe that there is a little insect which lives in the ear, called *chinyeno lipikamile*, which tells the person what is said to him, the wax in the ear being its excrement. The pupil is called *mwanache jua liso*, the child of the eye.

22. Among women, the uterus is called *nameso* (*meso* = eyes); it is supposed to be a little person who holds the foetus. When the child is born, *nameso* cannot find it and starts looking about, the movements causing the afterpains.

23. A man making his first journey to the coast used to sprinkle himself with water from every stream he crossed to give him a safe journey. In the same way, women at the present day going between Zomba and Blantyre sprinkle their babies with water from each stream.

24. An ant-like insect called *sdupotumba* (*tumbatumba*, Chin.) [*diaspidoris mephistis*] is lucky. On seeing it a native pats its belly and then rubs his own, wishing for plenty of food that day. *If* he is embarking on a journey or beginning some enterprise, he will wrap one of these insects in a fold of his loin cloth and take it with him for luck.

25. When a native hears the *mwipo* bird call (its call is like the mew of a cat), if he wants something, he immediately says, "Oh *mwipo*, I want so-and-so. Be quiet and I will then be quiet, too!" If the bird ceases calling, he knows the wish will be granted. The female bird is said to be the more certain prophet.

26. The snake, *nabulukuti*, which lives in trees and is of a buff clay color with green markings, is said by natives to pierce the chest and tie a knot in itself on each side so that it can only be withdrawn by cutting off one knot. When the snake is thus withdrawn, its blood mixes with that of the man and he will die.

27. Natives have a habit of marking the spot where any event takes place by a stone by the side of the path, and every passer-by will add a stone *for* luck. In this way some large piles of stones have been made.

28. A man resting on his way home from a long journey places a stone in the fork between the branches of a nearby tree, so that on his arrival he may find his wife has put by some food for him and has not used up the day's stock of flour.

29. A chameleon found digging in the path is said to presage the death of the finder's nearest relative.

769 A man leaving his village on some expedition and wishing to be assured of safe conduct
● 484 will procure some millet flour. Going quietly into his house, he squats down in one corner
787 and gently sifts the flour through his hand so that it falls on the floor in the form of a little cone, repeating as he does so, his prayer for safe conduct beginning and ending with the word *chonde!* please!

[539] *"Chonde! chonde! wa-ku-mulungu ombuje mlangweye maso pangu nilikome*
"Please, please! those at above ancestor clear eyes mine that I may see
*litole, ngwiche 'chenene kunguja, chonde! chonde! chococonde!"*
the path, may I arrive well where I go, please, please, please!"

He then covers the cone of flour with a basket. On the morrow, he will uncover it to see what has happened. According as the cone has remained intact or has fallen to one side or the other, the omen indicates whether or not the journey should be undertaken, the reaction being caused by the spirits to whom his supplication was addressed.

✓769 Again, there may have occurred much sickness in a village and the people conclude that the pest has come to remind them that they have not been attentive to their deceased chief. "His grave-house in the village has been allowed to fall into decay," and so on. They will decide that his spirit must be propitiated. The grave-house is rebuilt, a pot is sunk in the ground, and beer is poured in, and round about heaps of flour are placed. Prayer is made to the chief at whose grave they are worshipping, supplicating him in person and "all others who are with you at *Mlungu*," asking that he will no longer cause ill to befall the village.

When a village is moved, the beer-pot from the grave of the old chief is taken to the new village and a ceremony similar to that just described takes place, with the prayer that he will come to the new village and continue to exercise his benevolent care over its people.

✓731 In 1880 when there was a threatened famine on account of long drought in Zomba district, Malemya decided that supplication for rain must be made to the spirits of his illustri-
769 ous predecessors. Kasonga, one of Malemya's wise men, acted as high priest. A large amount of beer was brewed and the night before the ceremony, twenty sheep and fifty goats were slaughtered. Plates of the meat, of rice and porridge were then placed on the ground round the grave-house of the old Malemya, and pots of beer set into the ground at intervals. At the head of the grave, little heaps of *mbepesi* flour were arranged. This flour had been prepared by such of Malemya's wives as were not near a menstrual period. The following morning, a fence was built round the grave, outside which all the people collected, while beyond them again was a second fence. Kasonga, accompanied by an assistant then appeared, and amid absolute silence entered the inner enclosure. He addressed to the old Malemya, at whose grave they were all assembled, a prayer for rain. He then repeated the prayer, invoking the aid of all the past line of chiefs down to the reigning Malemya, re-
[516] peating their names. Returning to the outer enclosure, he again uttered the prayers, all the assembled multitude repeating them after him while lying face down, resting on their

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7



Women stick on a small spit a pretty green and white beetle, one of the *Cetoniidae*. The free end of the spit is then held between the teeth. At different positions on the stick, the buzzing of the impaled insect gives rise to different notes. The beetle is named *chingwengwenga* or *chiswiswiswi* (*sangalire*, Chin.). The wing-covers of another beetle, *matochetsche*, a *Lamellicorn*, are used by women for the making of a musical instrument. The wing-covers of some twenty of these insects are threaded on a string arranged round the shoulders and feet of the player as she sits on the ground. The string on each side, as it passes from the shoulder to the foot of the same side, is plucked by the fingers of the opposite hand, different notes being obtained by different degrees of tension put on the string by pressure with the feet. The wing-covers give a buzzing quality to the notes which all natives like.

Mention should also be made of the horn, *lipenga*, commonly made of a long piece of reed or bamboo with a trumpet-shaped end, made out of a portion of a gourd. Antelope horns are also used. The horn is blown on journeys.

**Dancing.** Dancing among the Yao, as among many other peoples, is the outcome of the pleasure experienced in rhythmical movements. The first accompaniment was probably the clapping of hands to mark time, followed by some exclamatory sounds more or less prolonged and occurring at regular intervals. Later, there was probably some refrain and, later still, drums were added to mark time, and songs formed an additional accompaniment. I believe that, here, dancing has always been an expression of pleasure and happiness and has been secondarily introduced at many ceremonies. In the majority of cases, such ceremonies were occasions of joy, the only exception being at funerals, but there I think their introduction was rather as a means of passing the time and avoiding silent brooding than as any real part of the rite.

The names given to various dances indicate their time or rhythm, and are, therefore, comparable to our own words, waltz, two-step, etc. There may be a number of airs for each time, and many sets of words to each air. The time may be given by clapping only, or by the addition of drums. Anyone acquainted with these dances, hearing drumming in the distance, can at once recognise the dance that is going on.

The drums which are used at dances (Pl. XXII), are made of a hollowed-out log of wood with a skin tambour stretched over the mouth of the drum and fixed by wooden pegs. On the tambour is smeared a layer of beeswax. The tambour is tightened by warming over a fire, so that the correct note is obtained; a fire is always kept burning close to the spot where drums are being played.

*Likuti:* a drum shaped somewhat like a native flour mortar, three to six feet high with the tambour one to two feet in diameter. The drum usually lies on the ground, the player sitting on the barrel of the drum, or he may have it suspended from him by a cord, the body of the drum dragging on the ground between his legs. It is played with both hands and gives a deep, resonant note, "*ti, ti, tí*" (Pl. XXII, figs. 12, 15).

4: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1909) 1910 FT7 Yao FT7
Marovi FR4



*Gaga*, the residue after pounding maize, is eaten by the women. No oils are used in cooking, but of fat and suet any native is very fond. Meat may be dried and smoked if in large quantity: flesh, fish and fowl is commonly roasted on spits; small pieces of chicken may be made into a kind of stew with beans and eaten as the relish. When on a journey the fire is commonly made against a tree. The cooking vessels are cleaned before use, not after. The fried fish eaten is often partly decomposed, and meat which is very high, even with maggots, is cooked and eaten, maggots and all.

*Taboo.*—Bushbuck is not eaten by many natives, as they say it feeds near graveyards. Fowls are not eaten by some, as this diet causes them to vomit; a snake-catcher never eats vegetables, and at the same time puts medicine on his hands. Many abstain from the flesh of certain animals as certain skin diseases are said to be caused thereby; all such diseases bear the name *wakwenga*.

A man who loses a relation by drowning takes an oath that he will never again eat fish, and never drink water from such lake, river, etc. Here the idea is of course simply to avoid eating part of the relation.

A Nyanja and Machinga will not eat the flesh of the hippopotamus, because on the body they say there are the marks of a string round the loins and of a mat on his back, adding that long ago he was a man. Animals of prey would never under any circumstances be eaten. Milk used never to be drunk by an adult, as it was said to cause a man to become as a child. A man would not dare to drink woman's milk as it was said he would surely die of dysentery.

*Tobacco, etc.*—The smoking of tobacco was a custom introduced from the coast. Chewing was general among Machinga and Yao men and women, while the Angoni and Mañanja snuffed. With the tobacco a little lime, made by burning shells, was taken in the mouth. Giddiness and sleepy sensations were experienced after chewing. The Nyasa and Awisa smoke a hubble-bubble, the water vessel being a large sausage-shaped gourd with a reed stem supporting a large bowl of *mbabwa* wood, sometimes very nicely carved (Plate XXVII, Figs. 5 and 7). The Amyanja smokes a pipe with the bowl made of clay and the stem of bamboo (Plate XXVII, Fig. 6); these are made by the women. Tobacco is grown in nearly every village, a large-leaved rather coarse variety; it is sun-dried and rolled up into hollow rings 6 inches in diameter and 3 inches broad. For snuff (*Fadia tomunas*) the sun-dried tobacco is further dried over a fire on a pan, when cold it is ground on a stone with a smaller stone by the women, and with it is mixed some ashes of the *ngoza* fig-tree.

At Blantyre I obtained a water-pipe made of bamboo stem; this was the water reservoir; a stem of reed supports a little clay bowl. The mouth is placed over the upper end of the bamboo. Bhang (*cannabis indica*) is smoked in a pipe of this kind.

## AGRICULTURE.

The people live by cultivating the soil. Both sexes help in hoeing and planting, the collecting of the crops being mostly done by women. The hoe is the